

hungry host

Project Proposal
Aitan Ebrahimoff

"I haven't got several identities: I've got just one, made up of many components combined together in a mixture that is unique to every individual."

Malouf 2000

"there is a strong effort to deny that we humans are also animals positioned in the food chain."

Plumwood 2009

My Practice

One thread running through my filmography and videos is the power dynamic active in feeding. Who is feeding who? What does it mean to be prey or predator? In *OOO (2020)* there is a deity in my loft that needs feeding. In *Commander (2020)*, a colonel is offered to the sea by animal-human hybrids. Finally, *Third Rock (2022)* depicts members of a secret movement making offerings to a giant frog. Through feeding powerful entities, characters wish for positive outcomes in worlds that mirror ours but play by different rules.

G Zi (2022) is a first-person POV video performance. With a GoPro strapped to my body, I make Ghormeh Sabzi, a stew from my childhood that my Persian grandmother often cooked. While shopping for ingredients, cooking, and eventually eating the stew I recount the history of the crypto Jews of Iran, a community that hid their religion in plain sight, pretending to be Muslim for many centuries. This video performance directly inspired *Third Rock (2022)*, a short sci-fi drama. The opening scene is a character making a stew in a domestic space which he seems alienated from. Its premise of a secret movement serving a supernatural being relates directly to my pre-history. I realised that fiction can offer a container for personal material.



Third Rock (2022)

dir. Aitan Ebrahimoff

film, stereo sound
07:30 duration

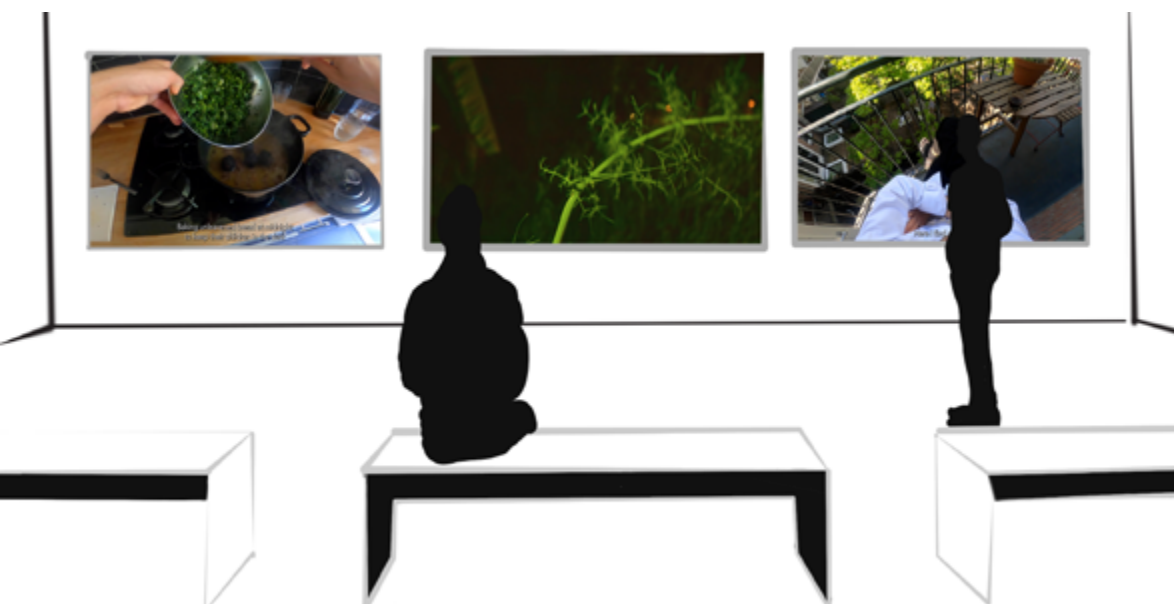
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Project Overview

These projects have led me to wonder if we can speak of diasporic hunger? I have a theory that my people – displaced Jews across the world with multiple national identities – eat not just to live but to fill a void. Eating food with kin can be a full-body experience. It is a layered communal ritual; we are immersed collectively in a thick, fatty vacuum isolated from society; in a place that's safe but disconnected from a greater whole. When my people were displaced, what cultural ingredients were mobilized and taken along for the journey? Recipes can be stored in muscle memory and replicated just about anywhere.

The power-dynamic inherent to feeding is a suitable metaphor when analyzing the diasporic experience. How does a host culture feed on its alien subjects? And reciprocally, how does the host feed its new subjects? How does the outsider assimilate or mutate to adapt to the new environment? With these cursory questions my interest in the overlap between biology, science fiction and the diasporic experience rises to the surface. Can feeding as a metaphor connect otherness and science fiction?

Through hungry host, a research-driven project culminating in a film installation, I aim to explore these questions and substantiate my speculative worldmaking with personal material. How might my personal history, and those of friends, kin, and interview participants, be channeled into hybrid cinema?



hungry host (2023)

installation view
3 channel film
5.1 surround sound

Form

The essay film can hold so many ideas and place the maker at the center, usually as a voiceover. By using my own subjectivity as a lens, I can actively acknowledge the problematics confronting this research. How do I relate to the turbulent histories of my ancestors? As a Western European, to what extent might I exoticize my Persian heritage? What personal histories am I ignoring? My grandparents were exiled from their homes under nationalist and fascist regimes, in Iran and Poland. I don't wish to translate these materials, but to mediate them in relation to my own subjectivity.

While the essay film can contain these stories it risks being hermetic. A hybrid film is an inspiring alternative; a mongrel, which oscillates between first-person vignettes and tableaux from a more fictive universe. Fiction offers a way out, an ability to delve into speculation, hyperbole, and to create immersive images and sounds which touch the subconscious. As Chris Marker proved with his essay film *Sans Soleil* (1983), the identity of the narrator can also be fictionalised, allowing for creativity to step in. I'm interested in combining documentary, autobiography, sci-fi, transcendental style, essay film to explore and express the complexity of diasporic identity. of the diasporic experience in relation to My Visual Abstract exhibits this blended approach.

visual abstract
(2022)

dir. Aitan Ebrahimoff
video, stereo sound
04:00 duration

[click still to view]



Process

The inputs include sci-fi novels and films, interviews with subjects while cooking, and academic texts that feed into hungry host. Diasporic essays such as Amin Maloof's *On Identity* intersect with visual references to contemporary cinema, such as Jordan Peele's sci-fi Western *Nope*. Automatic writing and autobiographical reflection will also be used to generate text. Finally I will delve into physical and virtual archives for traces of kin and Jewish life to better understand the relationship between the outsider and the host culture.

The screenplay is a vital tool in sculpting these inputs. I will translate these scripts using the following tools to mediate my research: documentary cinematography and field recordings in atmospheric locations; first-person scripted and improvised performances; constructed sci-fi scenes with narrative threads to connect to the documentary footage. Through an ongoing editing process I will sculpt and structure the footage to develop a suitable structure for the narrative, at times guided by voiceover. The final output is a hybrid film presented as a film installation. The viewer can decide their physical proximity to the work and the framing of the film can change the relationship to the piece in generative ways. As a hybrid sci-fi it fills befitting to create an immersive environment that extends beyond the screen.



Dec 2022	Document Jewish Cemetery Amsterdam, NL	Cooking Interview Qali Nur Dutch Somali Filmmaker Amsterdam, NL	Video Editing
	Interview Rabbi Nachshon Portuguese Community Amsterdam, NL	Scriptwriting	Document Schipol Airport Amsterdam, NL
Jan 2023	Visit Eye Film Archive Amsterdam, NL	Document Family Interviews London, UK	Cooking Interview Isabelle De Costa Amsterdam, NL
	Online Interview Chief Rabbi Tehran, Iran	Scriptwriting	Video Editing
Feb 2023	Interview Bibi (Grandma) Tel Aviv, Israel	Scriptwriting	Film Speculative Scene #1
	Visit Jewish Museum Archive NL + Israel		Video Editing
Mar 2023	Film Speculative Scene #2		Installation Design
	Scriptwriting	Video Editing	
Apr 2023	Film Speculative Scene #3	Installation Design	Color Grading
			Image Lock Edit
May 2023	Sound Mixing		Installation Install
6		Mastering	

Who can help?

- PZI Lens Based Media Colleagues
- Graduate Project mentors Cihad Caner and David Haines
- Family and friends
- Renzo Martens, The Institute of Human Activities
- Freelance Contacts - sound designers, color graders, cinematographers, sound mixers
- Bendigamos Portuguese Jewish Community, Amsterdam
- Jewish Museum Amsterdam, Curator and Archive Team

Why Make It?

hungry host suggests various scenarios: the host as an insatiable parasite; the host who remains hungry so their guests might eat; the host who restrains from feeding on the guests. hungry host is a thick research area with outcomes that can extend beyond my graduation work.

My work to date has touched on some of the key oppositions described: insider/outsider, reality/fiction, predator/prey. My work has used a number of the techniques described above – such as first-person filmmaking, voiceover, essayistic registers, and constructed science fiction narratives. hungry host is a way to bridge these interests and methodologies. To integrate these strands into a whole, a bundle, a practice.

Cultural Context

These films, with their digestive subtext and speculative content, belong to science fiction. How does a host culture feed on its alien subjects? In Jordan Peele's sci-fi Western *Nope* (2022), the protagonists hunt an alien that is haunting the sky above their ranch, threatening to swoop down and devour them whole. Feeding becomes a metaphor for the black experience in the USA, where the possibility of being consumed by the host is an ever-present threat. Peele skillfully combines the Western and sci-fi to create an empowering tale of prey overcoming predator. However, it is the humans, the host, that hunt and obliterate the beautiful cosmic alien life form. What if humans came last? What if humans were devoured in an epic Hollywood reversal?

There are strong ecological implications in reversing this power dynamic. "The idea of human prey threatens the dualistic vision of human mastery in which we humans manipulate nature from outside, as predators but never prey." (Plumwood 2000) The positioning of the human as subordinate to the planet highlights the enlivening potential of hungry host. Indeed, as well as dealing with first encounters, outsiders and aliens, sci-fi often responds to ecological concerns such as resource scarcity and biological catastrophe.

When combined with archival research of the diaspora, hungry host enters a dialogue with decolonial artistic practices (Vázquez 2021). I think this movement in contemporary art and academia is particularly poignant when it engages the maker's personal narrative. Fiona Tan's film *Footsteps* (2022) combines silent documentary footage from the Eye Film Museum's archive of Dutch life over a century ago with a voiceover reading letters sent from her father when she first moved to the Netherlands in the 1980s. The result is emotive and stunning, activating memory and historical material in a profound way.

Chris Marker's *Sans Soleil* (1983) is the quintessential hybrid of essay-film and experimental cinema. The narrator reads from letters sent to her by the cameraman Sandor Krasna. In a perversion of the documentary form, it becomes clear that Krasna is fictitious. As a meditation on the deficiencies of memory, it shows how cultures and global histories can transform beyond recognition over time. The shape-shifting nature of hybrid films make them suitable referents for hungry host and its slippery content.

References

Texts

- Deleuze, G (1989) *Cinema 2: The Time Image*. Tomlinson, H & R Galeta (Trans). University of Minnesota Press.
- Haraway, D. J. (1985) *A Cyborg Manifesto*. Duke University Press.
- Haraway, D. J. (2016). *Staying with the Trouble*. Duke University Press.
- Kershenbaum, A (2021) *The Zoologist's Guide to the Galaxy: What Animals on Earth Reveal About Aliens — and Ourselves* .
- Kolk, B (2014) *The Body Keeps the Score: Mind, Brain and Body in the Transformation of Trauma*. Penguin, London.
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- Maalouf, A (2000) *On Identity*, trans. B Bray, The Harvill Press, London.
- Plumwood, V (1995) *Human Vulnerability and the Experience of Being Prey*. *Quadrant*, 39(3), 29–34 .
- Vázquez, R (2021) *Vistas of Modernity*. Jap Sam Books. Prinsensbeek, Netherlands.
- Weber, A. (2019) *Enlivenment: Toward a Poetics for the Anthropocene*. MIT Press, London.

Films

- Eraserhead* (1977) dir. Lynch, D. 1 Channel Film, Stereo soundtrack, 01:29:00 duration, Libra Films, United States.
- HyperNormalisation* (2016) dir. Curtis, A. 1 channel film, Stereo soundtrack, 02:46:00 duration, BBC Films, United Kingdom.
- Nope* (2022) dir. Peele, J. 1 channel film, Stereo soundtrack, 02:10:00 duration, Universal Pictures, United States
- Pulse* (2001) dir. Kurosawa, K. 1 Channel Film, Stereo soundtrack, 01:19:00 duration, Toho, Japan.
- Sans Soleil* (1983) Marker, C. 1 Channel Film, Stereo soundtrack, 01:40:00 duration, Argos Films, France.
- Space is the Place* (1974) dir. John Coney. 1 Channel Film, Stereo soundtrack, 01:25:00 duration, United States.
- Teknolust* (2002) dir. Lynn Hershman Leeson. 1 Channel Film, Stereo Soundtrack, 01:25:00 duration, Velocity Entertainment, United States.
- Titane* (2021) dir. Ducournau, J. 1 channel film, Stereo soundtrack, 01:48:00 duration, Diaphana Distribution, France.
- Videodrome* (1983) dir. Cronenberg, D. 1 channel film, Stereo soundtrack, 01:29:00 duration, Universal Pictures, Canada.

Artworks

First Person Plural, The Electronic Diaries Of Lynn Hershman Leeson 1984-1996 (1995) dir. Leeson, L.H. 1 channel film, Stereo soundtrack, 01:15:00 duration, Zentrum für Kunst und Medien, Germany

I turn over the pictures of my voice in my head (2009) dir. Export, V. 1 channel film, Stereo Soundtrack, 12:00 duration, Austria

La Jetee (1962) dir. Marker, C. 1 channel film, Stereo soundtrack, 00:28:00 duration, Argos Films, France.

Journey to the Moon (2009) Ataman, K. 1 channel fiilm, Stereo soundtrack, stereo soundtrack, 01:19:00 duration, Turkey.

Love in the Message, The Message is Death (2016) Jafa, A. 1 channel video installation, stereo soundtrack, 00:08:00 duration. Exhibited Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago & the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam (2018).

Personal Artworks

Commander (2021) dir. Ebrahimoff, A. 1 channel film, Stereo sound, 05:00 duration.

<https://vimeo.com/360577826>

G-Zi (2022) dir. Ebrahimoff, A. 1 channel film, Stereo sound, 09:15 duration.

<https://vimeo.com/769060800/c4d96fb726>

OOO (2020) dir. Ebrahimoff, A. 1 channel film, Stereo sound, 03:03 duration.

<https://vimeo.com/411479414>

Third Rock (2022) 1 channel film, Stereo sound, 07:30 duration.

<https://vimeo.com/723286598/c3246e8b33>

Visual Abstract (2022) 1 channel film, Stereo sound, 04:00 duration.

<https://vimeo.com/761100674/9fccd9a1f1>